

This tiny five verse easy-to-memorize psalm explodes with meaning like a split atom.¹ Psalm 100 brings the enthronement psalms (93-100) to a resounding conclusion. “Of these royal psalms the hundredth is the doxology.”² The pulsating rhythm of action verbs makes it impossible to sit still and say this psalm without feeling. This capstone psalm is what we would expect after celebrating the global reach of the kingdom of God. To know the Lord who reigns in justice and righteousness and who is worshiped in the splendor of his holiness, is to express exuberant heartfelt joy. If evangelistic worship is the leading edge of the mission of the church then Psalm 100 is its jubilant crescendo.

Two parallel stanzas rhyme the invitation to active participatory worship based on knowing that the Lord is God, that he made us, that we are his people. The second stanza repeats the call to worship based on thanksgiving and praise, for the Lord is good, his love endures forever, and his faithfulness never ends. The voice that is calling out to us is the shared voice of the worshipping community. Psalm 100 is a hymn not a solo. Together, we share in the responsibility to encourage one another to “shout for joy to the Lord” and to “enter his gates with thanksgiving.” The psalmist does not envision a pastor-dominated worship service, where we sit idly by as observers waiting to be moved and inspired. We are not an audience of spectators looking to the “professionals” to do worship to us and for us, nor are we consumers of a spiritual product; we are active participants in worship.

Psalm 100 is a simple call to worship that serves its purpose effectively without much interpretation. Believers grasp its powerful meaning intuitively. The poet-psalmist has arranged the rhythm of its seven verbs, “shout,” “serve,” “come,” “know,” “enter,” “give thanks,” and “bless,” to give the psalm a driving beat. The thrust of the psalm is assured by its positive vocabulary modifying the verbs, “joy,” “gladness,” “joyful,” “thanksgiving,” and “praise.” And most importantly, everything said and felt is centered on the Lord who is the principal subject of everything going on the psalm. We worship the Lord. He is God. He made us. He is our Shepherd and we are his people. We celebrate his goodness, his enduring love and his faithfulness through all generations.

The beauty and depth of Psalm 100 has inspired hymns and songs of praise, including “Jubilate Deo,” William Kethe’s “All people that on earth do well.” Isaac Watts, “Before the Lord’s eternal throne, ye nations bow with sacred joy,” and Chris Tomlin’s “Psalm 100.” We should not be surprised that this psalm inspires musicians and artists and theologians. Its simple power should be embraced and its theological depth and pastoral implications explored.

Shout for Joy

*Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;*

¹ Augustine, Psalms, 487. Augustine writes, “The verses are few, but big with great subjects; may the seed bring forth within your hearts, the barn be prepared for the Lord’s harvest.”

² Stott, Favorite Psalms, 91.

*come before him with joyful songs.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*
Psalm 100:1-3

The sheer joy and exuberance of Psalm 100 encourages the worshiper to shed the inhibitions rooted in selfish pride and insecurity and come before the Lord with a freedom rooted in faith and forgiveness. This is not a call to self-expression as much as a call to forget about oneself in the community of praise. We are invited into a realm of joy that brings release from being overly self-preoccupied and relief from our deeply ingrained cultural traditions and habits. Psalm 100 draws the lonely individual out of the crowd and into the joyous processional. Instead of liturgical fastidious or entertainment, Psalm 100 gives the believer a solid foundation for the deep meaning and joyous emotion of real God-centered worship.

The first line of the psalm “should be thought-provoking to sing,” because it “claims the world for God.”³ It harkens back to a theme running through the enthronement psalms: “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music” (Ps 98:4; see 96:7; 97:1). The whole earth ought to shout for joy, for we all belong to the Lord who is our maker and redeemer. Steward Brand’s 1968 Whole Earth Catalog with NASA’s iconic picture of the earth on its cover celebrated two countercultural truths, the environment and the human community. Brand’s intuitive grasp of creation care and human society were surely right, but what was missing was his understanding of creation’s Creator and humanity’s Author, Redeemer, and King. Brand thought man’s spiritual longings could be fulfilled through technology, but only the Lord can bring about the new humanity for a new heaven and a new earth.

Invitation and imperative merge in the call to worship the Lord with gladness. This is not about happily attending upbeat church services. This is about finding our greatest joy and deepest meaning in serving the Lord with our whole being. Worshiping the Lord “involves a serious submission of the whole self.”⁴ This is body-mind-heart-and soul-worship that does not cease at the narthex, but moves out into every place and in every sphere of life where we are “before him,” which is to say everywhere. There is no gap between worship and work; life is all of one piece.⁵ The apostle Paul echoes this theology of worship when he urges brothers and sisters, “in view of God’s mercy, to offer [their] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship” (Rom 12:1).

We worship the Lord *knowingly* because the Lord has chosen to disclose himself personally. He is the same person who promised Abraham, “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). He gave his name to Moses, “I am who I am” (Exod 3:14). He promised David an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam 7:13) and to the prophet Jeremiah a new covenant (Jer 33:31). We know him as our Maker; we are the work of his hands (Isa 29:23). We say with the psalmist,

³ Kidner, Psalms, 356.

⁴ Goldingay, Psalms, vol.3, 135

⁵ Kidner, Psalms, 356.

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor” (Ps 8:5). We know him as our Shepherd; “we are his people and the sheep of his pasture” (Ps 100:3). We know him as our Redeemer. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). To worship the Lord *knowingly* is to say with Paul, “but by the grace of God I am what I am,” and to know “all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:10; Rom 3:24).⁶ Psalm 100 celebrates the beauty of knowing God as our Creator and Redeemer with heartfelt praise and thanksgiving and without a hint of cynicism or discouragement.

Enter with Praise

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*
Psalm 100:4-5

The universal invitation to “enter his gates” goes out to all the nations from the people of God. The reasons for God’s magnanimous openness to all are clearly stated. His goodness, love, and faithfulness are forever. But the psalmist did not realize then what we know now that “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whosoever believes in him should not die but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

We cannot imagine Jesus praying this psalm without envisioning the universal reach of the gospel. The privilege and responsibility to offer this call to worship to the world belongs to the priesthood of all believers, to all those who have been commissioned by Christ “to go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Our joy is to encourage and support one another in worship and service. The vision of temple worship pictured in Psalm 100 is transposed in the New Testament and applied to the church – the people of God: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet 2:9). This is why the author of Hebrews declares:

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart with full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,

⁶ Calvin, Psalms, 84. In contrast to the exuberance of Psalm 100, Calvin’s exposition of these verses is decidedly negative. He alludes to the Papacy and the impossibility of true worship of God taking place while God’s glory is being profaned and superstition exists. Ironically, Calvin uses this psalm to address the ingratitude found among most people: “. . . Scarcely one among a hundred seriously acknowledges that he holds his existence from God. . . yet every man makes a god of himself, and virtually worships himself, when he ascribes to his own power what God declares belong to him alone.”

for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb 10:19-25).